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In anticipation of the collection for the Bible Cause next Sunday, a reading is requested for the accompanying "Sketch," published in another connection, but well exhibiting a single department of the work of the NEW YORK BIBLE SOCIETY.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

OF

Ocean Colportage,

BY SEAMEN FROM THE PORT OF NEW YORK.

A SKETCH

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A paper, prepared for, and in part read before, the American Seamen's Friend Society, at its Fiftieth Anniversary, May 6, 1878.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

OF

OCEAN COLPORTAGE.

ORDINARILY, when seamen appear in the records of the benevolent operations of the church, it is as the objects of its labors and of its benefactions. I propose in this paper to exhibit them in quite another character, as the laborious and valued helpers of the church, in its plans for the conversion of the world—bringing to it facilities and talents peculiarly adapted for the prosecution of a certain kind of foreign evangelistic work, which is entirely beyond the scope and power of its regular missionary agencies. A striking example of this service is afforded in a unique work carried on now for twenty-five years in this port, under the direction of the New York Bible Society and the American Tract

Society, in which seamen appear as the efficient agents in circulating large quantities of religious reading and of the Scriptures at many points upon the globe.

This work forms the theme of the present paper, which may be stated more definitely as follows: *The facts and lessons of a quarter century of Bible and tract distribution in Roman-catholic countries, as carried on through seamen sailing from the port of New York.*

The history of the work in this port—and I am not aware that it has been elsewhere attempted in any like extent—may be given in a few words. From the first, our Societies had occasionally invoked the aid of seamen in reaching remote or inaccessible points. In the Annual Reports of the New York Bible Society for 1850 and the two following years, such distributions appear with increasing frequency: but it was not till 1853 that this work was organized, and became a regular part of the scheme of the said Societies; the American Bible Society freely granting for this foreign use, and the American Tract Society heartily coöperating. Since that date, these distributions have continued to increase, as experience has shown their usefulness: so that during the twelve months ending Sept. 30, 1877, they amounted to 10,989 copies of the Scriptures (mainly Testaments), and 2,200,000 pages of the publications of the American Tract Society, sent forth upon 1,327

vessels: with a total for the last twenty-five years, of 130,000 Bibles and Testaments, and 35,000,000 pages of tracts. All these were (with a few exceptions) in the four languages of southern Europe.

And now in noticing the peculiarities of this system of Gospel propagandism, I may briefly premise, that it wisely addresses itself primarily to seaport towns, to the mercantile class, and to seamen.

As the ocean is a prominent source of physical life and motion upon the globe, so history shows that the extending of civilization and the spreading of new ideas are largely due to the classes mentioned—those "who do business upon the great waters," whose life-work it seems to be to stir up matters and keep the world from stagnation.

From the same source we learn further that the natural atmosphere of great marts of commerce, where men of various nationalities and faiths come together to exchange opinions, as well as material commodities, is one of comparative freedom of thought and of toleration of novelties. New religious truth has often found at such points its promptest hearing, its readiest propagation, and its asylum; in proof of which we may cite such names as La Rochelle, London, Geneva, and the cities of Holland.

Again, as to the commencement, by the societies in

this port of New York, of this world-wide work of Christian colportage through the agency of seamen, notice that it was the plain result of their location, suggesting and almost forcing it upon them. It was the most natural and simple thing for them to use *the currents of commerce* flowing by their very doors, to convey their books to their first destinations, the larger seaports of the world, from which minor currents again might be relied upon to give them a still wider dispersion.

These great commercial currents may be compared to the venous system in the human body, into which if a medicine be injected at one point, it will presently be found affecting a remote one; or to the great "ocean rivers," which do so much to keep the waters of the sea fresh and sweet.

Go off shore a hundred miles till you come to the edge of the "indigo blue" water, and drop there a sealed bottle, and before many months your message may be picked up by some one on the coast of France or of the Hebrides. Bayard Taylor noticing once some peculiarity in a log on the driftwood fire in a lighthouse upon the northern coast of Norway, examined it, and recognized a tropical wood peculiar to South America. A thousand miles, possibly, from the sea, overhanging some tributary of the Amazon. the tree had grown, been

overthrown by storm or the undermining of the bank, had floated down to the Father of Waters and then on its broad bosom to the ocean; there taken up by the great equatorial current and carried through the Caribbean sea, the Gulf of Mexico, the Florida straits and across the Atlantic, to rest at last, a worn and barnacled fragment, upon the extreme shore of northern Europe.

This may serve as an illustration of the power of the forces we can command, and of the very unexpected and remote lodgment which books set afloat here at New York may attain.

Take as a specimen the following from the report of the New York Bible Society:

"Captain C—— of the American brig ——, which sailed from here for the east coast of Africa last year, brings back a report of distributions made of Scriptures and tracts in French, Portuguese, and Arabic, as follows. At Zanzibar he distributed with great acceptance, to a number of Portuguese from Goa, on the coast of Hindostan. At Mozambique, he gave an Arabic Testament to a Mussulman gentleman of standing, who took it with reiterated injunctions of secresy. At Aden, the American consul asked a copy in the same language, to lend to his Mohammedan acquaintances. At Muscat, another Arabic Testament was given to the first naval officer in the service of the Imaum of Muscat. He also distributed in the French language, at the Maldive Islands, at several points on the coast of Madagascar, and on the small islands to the north of it.

In one instance, a Frenchman at a lonely trading-station in

Madagascar, to whom he had given a French Bible and tracts, was so much pleased that he sent him down a touching letter of thanks, and a piece of silver for the Society. 'I am not in very good circumstances,' were his words, 'as you know; but I beg you to cast into the treasure-chest of this Society five francs, the poor man's farthing (*le denier du pauvre*), to aid the expenses of this benevolent work.'"

And here I will say, that I do not think we of New York appreciate the advantages we enjoy for this particular missionary work, in living at such a world-centre, the second commercial port on the globe, whose shipping (its own and foreign) gives us ready communication with every shore, and especially with large sections of Roman-catholic Christendom. In the words of a report of the American Tract Society, "The grooves of commerce are already laid down for us, which we have only to use, in order to send our publications with precision and without expense to the ends of the earth. The package carefully made up for the particular destination—of Spanish Testaments and tracts, or Portuguese or Italian, as the case may be—is placed to-day in the hands of the captain of a vessel lying at one of our piers, and in a month's time its contents are delighting and instructing a score of families in Brazil or Spain or Sicily."

Almost any day I can go down into South street and put my hand on the shoulder of a captain who will do

my benevolent errand in Shanghai, or Pará, or Callão. And not only so, but he may perhaps introduce me to a passenger in his cabin who, when the sea-voyage is ended, will be going farther—up the Yang-Tse river, or to the silver mines among the Andes, or deep into the forests of Brazil. So that not only all shores washed by the salt sea, or by the navigable streams that flow into it, are our field, but also inland regions in communication with the same; for to these we can teach the sailor to send, if he cannot carry, our books.

And, as a matter of fact, I suppose that scarcely an inhabited island, or stretch of seacoast, or commercial city of moderate size reached by American products, could be found which, in stray Testament or tract, would not exhibit token of the ubiquitous character of this work done by seamen sailing from the port of New York.

Perhaps the most eloquent statements of the wide scope of these distributions would be the simple enumeration of the ports reached in a single month, as in January, 1878, which is as follows: Havana, St. Jagos, Sagua, Cienfuegos, Nuevitas, Matanzas, Rio Hache, Trinidad de Cuba, Porto Rico, Martinique, Guadaloupe, Jeremie, Aux Cayes, Port au Prince, Gonaives, Jacmel, Belize, Honduras, Truxillo, Omoa, Puerto Cortes, Vera Cruz, Savanilla, Porto Cabello, Ciudad Bolivar, Rio

Janeiro, Pará, Pernambuco, Rio Grande, Buenos Ayres, Rosario, Montevideo, Callão, Bordeaux, Lisbon, Cadiz, Gibraltar, Santander, Corunna, Canary Islands, Genoa, Naples, Leghorn, Messina, Zanzibar, and Manilla.

Yet these names do not tell the whole story even of a single month. They say nothing of the *distributions by the way*—at the lonely islands touched at in the Pacific, not down on the map, yet already inhabited by fugitives from civilization; or to the negro wreckers on the Bahama Keys (mere ribs of sand with a backbone, perhaps, of coral, and a vegetation of a few palms), who watch for the sailor, and as the welcome sail appears in sight, come out to meet him "singing hymns," and "bringing fish and fruit to exchange for Testaments or tracts;" or "to French and Portuguese trading-vessels met with up the rivers Pongos and Nunez, West Africa;" or to Russian officers, glad of a few tracts in Swedish and German, in their isolation at a military post near the mouth of the Amoor river.

Says the captain of the ship Argosy,

"What remained of your supply of Testaments and tracts and papers found an excellent distribution on our return from England by the northern passage. Just there we were boarded by several boats from Fair Island, a small affair lying alone by itself in latitude 59 degrees, midway between the Orkney and the Shetland Islands. The hundred or two of inhabitants are very poor, have no settled minister, and few books; and, beyond what they get

out of the sea (fish, sea-fowl, etc.), are mainly dependent upon occasional supplies from passing vessels. We Americans, you know, have a reputation for open-handed liberality, and I tried to meet their expectations. I bought their fish, gave them a handsome lift out of the pork-barrel, and lastly hunted up for them all the Testaments, tracts, papers, and old books I could muster. This pleased them most of all; and they went away delighted."

Nor is mere distance recognized as an insuperable obstacle at a centre like New York. Let any unusual gathering of people, on almost any shore, present a special call for the Bible and the tract—whether it be of armies in the Crimea, or of a French fleet at Vera Cruz, or of a Telegraph Expedition at Sitka on the Northwest coast—and we shall find means by the help of the sailor to do something for them, though our supply have to be forwarded (as in one instance) upon a vessel *loaded with rum!*

As to the methods of distribution, the following may serve as a specimen of the ordinary type.

The captain of the brig D—— says: "On the first evening after our arrival at Malaga, a party of ladies and gentlemen came down to the water's side to enjoy the sea breeze. Seeing the American flag aloft, they asked to be allowed to come on board and view the Yankee craft. After minutely examining things on deck, they asked for a peep into the cabin. In anticipation of visitors, I had, according to yonr printed directions, plentifully covered the cabin table with Spanish Testaments and tracts. Of course these attracted their immediate attention. They were delighted with the books, some of them never having seen a Testa-

ment before. When I offered them copies, they could hardly be persuaded to accept, but almost insisted upon their right to purchase. Three of these Testaments went to a village twenty-five miles inland. About a week afterwards, an old man over seventy years of age, from this town, came on board. He had seen the Testaments, and travelled all that distance for the sole purpose of getting one. It was sad to be obliged to tell him that the last copy had been given some days. I gave the cabin another overhauling, in hopes of finding something in Spanish for him; but not even a tract was to be had. When I announced the result, the old gentleman burst into tears, and bade me a sorrowful adieu."

The *peculiar traits of the sailor* are often illustrated by these distributions—his enterprise, his fearlessness, as also the singular immunity he seems to possess of doing everywhere pretty much what he pleases, without challenge.

In one case he takes the ship's boat Sunday morning and visits the vessels in the roadstead, or he pulls out to the old hulk which serves as a hospital, or to the Spanish man-of-war; on all which his books are enthusiastically received. Or he divides his package among the raftsmen who have floated mahogany down the river to the vessel; or among the fishing-craft and bum-boat-men boarding the vessel as it lies becalmed off the coast of Spain; or at Cadiz, among the laborers unloading the cargo—one of whom failing to receive, offers to "work a whole night for a Testament." Or, more boldly, he goes ashore to the market-place at sunrise, so as to

catch the market-people from the country, or to the town jail to give to the prisoners; or he distributes tracts from house to house in Havana, exhorting also as well as his small stock of Spanish will permit; or in the same port he takes a basket loaded with Spanish reading matter to the large fort adjoining the Moro, and is well received. In Malaga, a captain, at the suggestion of a soldier, takes his wife and the Spanish package, and visits the barracks, where they are welcomed as guests, and have to write their names in every Testament given. At Alicante, a mate, thinking with singular simplicity that "the cathedral must be a good place to distribute Testaments and tracts," visits it, empties his pockets, and comes away unscathed.

When *the priest* has appeared upon the scene in connection with these distributions in Roman-catholic countries, it has generally been to make trouble; but not always, especially in Spanish America and Brazil. Here the village "padre," uneducated, far removed from supervision, and in kindly sympathy with his flock, has not infrequently dared to receive the Scriptures himself, and to recommend them to his people. I remember one notable case in a Mexican port, of a Prior in the order of the Augustins, a leading man from his intelligence and position, and an eminent preacher, who did not hesitate to circulate the Spanish Testaments and tracts

which a captain brought him from voyage to voyage. On one occasion he sent $6 to buy the Tract Society's "Cartilla," and other Spanish books for his school.

The *government official* too (of the customs, or of the health service) so generally supposed to be our enemy in those old times when the Bible was contraband, more frequently proved to be our friend. The bow bent too far, breaks; and tyrannical laws which violate man's deepest instincts of right, telling him what he may and what he may not read for his soul's salvation, often happily secure their own non-enforcement. So the custom-house officer, an intelligent man necessarily, and liberalized by intercourse with foreigners, instead of preventing distributions, has often relieved the captain from the labor and risk of making them, securing first for himself the prohibited book, and then taking other copies ashore for his friends.

The reports have much to tell of this class of men.

"Mr. S—— relates an incident which occurred when he was mate on a vessel in the port of Denia several years ago. The captain gave a Bible and some tracts to an official, who took them on shore, where they were seized, and himself imprisoned for a day or two by the authorities. Learning where he had obtained them, they came on board, and with threats of seizing the vessel for breach of the laws, they forced the captain to promise that he would refrain from any further distributions. One evening the officer who had lost his Bible swam out to the vessel, and appealed to the captain to give him another. The captain, true to his prom-

ise, refused to do this, though the man actually got down upon his knees in his earnestness; but being called out of the cabin to attend to some duty, his wife was persuaded by the man's entreaties, and he swam away with the Bible tied on the top of his head."

"Once," said the captain, "at Ponce we had on board a custom-house officer who had been a captain in the Spanish army in St. Domingo, a grave, gentlemanly person, quite superior to his class. According to my usual habit, I one day brought out a Spanish Testament from my shelf, and handed it to him. He read the title-page attentively, then rose, put his hand in his pocket for his purse, and offered me half an ounce in gold ($8) for it. Of course I declined, and asked him to accept it as a gift. He read on through the first chapter of Matthew, then rose again, took out the gold coin, and insisted that I should receive it. I had to explain to him that the books were not mine, but were put in my library by certain benevolent people in New York for this very purpose of doing good ("*por amor de Dios*") without expectation of return. 'Ah,' said he, 'the people of New York are true Christians' ('*mucho Cristianos*'). All the time that he remained on board, and had opportunity to read, that book was in his hand, and when he left, he wrapped it up carefully and put it in his bosom."

This man had evidently heard of the Bible, or had seen it, and was waiting for an opportunity to become its possessor.

Some of these earlier reports of the New York Bible Society bring vividly to mind the state of things prevailing twenty-five years ago, now fortunately ended, when most of southern Europe was closed to the Bible: when ship-owners often forbade their vessels taking our packages on account of the danger: when our books found on shore were burned, and the captain threatened; when the obnoxious material in the cabin was

seized, to be returned when the vessel sailed (which it often was not); and when such cases were occasionally reported as that of Agostino Francis, mate of the Sicilian brig Anna, who was sentenced in Palermo to ten months' imprisonment and a fine of sixty dollars for having in his possession an Italian Bible obtained in New York.

In those days when large populations were met with to whom the Bible was known only by name, it was often the supreme privilege of the missionary sailor to convey to God's hidden ones—humble earnest souls, unenlightened, yet "touching the hand of God in the darkness," and thus guided through bewildering superstitions to a saving knowledge of essential truth — the great boon of His genuine and complete word.

I remember a case in which, in Havana, a mate received a secret application for Testaments and tracts for the use of a circle of natives in one of the suburbs, who met regularly to pray and read, earnestly seeking the truth in this way. The movement had its rise in reading Spanish books brought from the cabins of American vessels.

A captain reports that when he was distributing in the Adriatic,

"One of these Italian Testaments reached a monastery six miles in the interior, and from that time onward the captain was daily

visited by some of the monks calling for tracts and Testaments, which they managed to carry ashore secreted in the folds of their long gowns. A gray-headed old monk, seventy years of age, walked down to the vessel and back to obtain a Testament. All were very grateful; and the captain was obliged to yield to their solicitations to accept in return the hospitalities of the monastery."

Here is an account of a distribution made at Fuerteventura, one of the smaller of the Canary Islands; and another in a quite different field.

"They have no priest, but some of them under the limited school provision made by the Spanish government, know how to read. They live by fishing and making barilla from the seaweed, for vessels that come there to load with that cargo. The captain described the joy of these poor people as really affecting, when they found that the books he gave them contained the whole life of '*Nuestro Señor Jesu-Cristo*,' and told them besides all about the apostles '*San Mateo*,' '*San Giacomo*,' and the rest, with whose names (and with little else of their history or writings) they were so familiar. As those who read the books aloud to the rest, here and there by snatches, made these discoveries, there was a general expression of delight: the Testaments were clasped to their breasts, and he was thanked again and again. They showed their gratitude by working with a will in loading his boats; and when the cargo of barilla was completed, and he bade them good-by, they waded up to the middle to help the last boat through the surf. The captain said the whole scene reminded him of the parting of the Ephesian Christians with St. Paul, 'sorrowing most of all for the words that he spake, that they should see his face no more.'"

"April.—Captain Anderson of the Norwegian bark U. M——, reports an interesting incident in connection with an Arabic Testament, which formed part of his supplies when he sailed from this port to the Levant, last May. When he arrived at Alexandria, he

laid the book, according to the printed instructions, 'upon his cabin table, for the use of visitors,' where it was presently seen by the son of the ship-chandler, an Egyptian and a Mohammedan, who furnished supplies to the vessel. This lad became deeply interested in the volume, reading it for hours every day. 'How is this?' said he; 'I see *nothing said about Mohammed here.*' In reply, the captain explained to him about the Christian's great Prophet and Saviour. The black slave who rowed the ship-chandler's boat every day to the vessel, also shared in the interest, listening to the captain's talk, and hearing the volume read aloud by the boy. When the reading was delayed, he would impatiently ask for it. Such was the daily scene during the three weeks of the vessel's stay; and when she sailed, with many thanks the precious book was carried ashore to be treasured and read in that Mohammedan household."

I wish that the limits of this paper would admit of our taking a single missionary field—South America, for instance, naturally ours by its proximity, and interesting from the needs of its sparse and ignorant population, all Romish—and noting in detail what this benevolent work has done for it. Not only for a quarter of a century, by the aid of seamen, have we been diligently bombarding with Testament and tract its fifteen thousand miles of seacoast, at the thirty or more points with which our commerce brings us in frequent in some cases almost weekly communication, but also by means of its great rivers, we have been able to penetrate in several directions to the heart of the continent.

The river Magdalena has carried our books almost

up to Bogotá. Ciudad Bolivar, a port of entry three hundred miles up the Orinoco, has often served as a dépôt, from which English and American engineers, employed in the small steamers which navigate the head waters of the Portuguesa and Apure rivers, have drawn Spanish Testaments and tracts for circulation eight hundred miles farther inland. From Maranhão, by similar means, the Brazilian captains being interested, distributions are frequently made among the settlements on the very borders of the Indian country. And the great rivers which join to form the La Plata, have again and again borne the sailor-colporteur even up to Paraguay, when it was almost a *terra incognita.*

A captain very recently gives us a striking picture:

"It is wonderful to see how anxious the people in this country are for the Word of God. When we got up to Corrientes (on the borders of Paraguay), the people found out that we had books on board as soon as the pilot got ashore. Presently we saw them coming, like an army marching, some with parrots and some with paroquets, to exchange for Testaments. I was sorry that we had only a few left to give them. Vessels rarely get up so far; we found only two there."

The story of the opening of the river Amazon to steam navigation in 1853–6, by Capt. Robert Nesbit of this city, is of deep interest. This was signalized by copious distributions of the gospel, for the first time all along its banks even to its remote sources on the

eastern slopes of the Andes, three thousand miles inland: so that toward the close of his three years' stay in those regions, during which frequent supplies in Spanish and Portuguese were sent to him, he would write, "I do not think there is a single village or settlement on the Amazon, from Tarma to Pará, where you are not represented, either by the four-page tract or the full Bible."

As the little iron steamer (one of two sent out in sections from this city and put together at Pará) awakened for the first time the echoes on those inland waters, the captain found (to quote his own words) that, "strange as it seemed, the fame of these books had preceded me up the river. I had, in many instances, scarcely time to have the steamer moored or tied to the bank, before they would be on board inquiring for the *Capitan Misionario*."

Especially in the portion of Peru east of the Andes, these novel distributions were enthusiastically received. The priests interposed no obstacles; "some of them even, who had never owned a full copy of the Bible in their lives," asking for it.

"In Peru, at Nauta, the governor-general of the eastern district, at whose table I ate all the while I was in that part of Peru, not only gladly received and read of every kind I had in Spanish, but *franked* them to different localities where I did not go, and often expressed his regret that I had no more for him to dis-

tribute. . . . He also sent one of the Society's Spanish Bibles to his family, in the city of Cajamarca, on the Pacific side of the Andes. He also sent one to each of the sub-prefectos in the towns of Moyabamba and Sarayacu. . . . . There were several schools established by his orders, with the little books from the Tract Society, that would never have been heard or thought of had it not been for them."

In the general destitution of school books in those remote regions, "the Spanish *Tract Primers* were like precious jewels." Even a copy of the four-page tract "Poor Joseph," protected by a strong cover, was used as a reading-book till it fell to pieces. Just before he left South America, Capt. Nesbit wrote,

"Again, if you ever happen up the mighty Amazon, or any of its tributaries, and take passage on one of the eight steamers now in successful operation upon their waters, you will find one of the American Bible Society's Bibles in each cabin, either fastened by a small chain to the side-table, or to the wall near one, for public use. They are thus secured so that they may not be stolen."

The door thus opened for the gospel by commercial and Christian enterprise has never been closed. Soon after, large grants from the American Bible and Tract Societies were sent to some eight persons at various points on the river, among whom was the official above mentioned, Gen. Francisco Alvarado Ortiz, of the Department of Loretto, Peru. And down to the present time, at frequent intervals, by the hands of Americans or Europeans employed on these steamers, or of the

Indian and half-breed crews of the rude barge-shaped canoes which still bring down nuts and hides and rubber to Pará, Portuguese and Spanish Testaments and tracts carried by seamen from this city, are finding their way to village or mission, a thousand miles up the great river.

Christian seamen often do valuable service in finding and setting to work *isolated Christians* living in the midst of unevangelized communities. There are many such, in whom religion has sadly declined from unfavorable surroundings and the absence of gospel privileges, who are revived and stimulated to duty by contact with the warm-hearted missionary sailor. In other cases, where there is the heart to work, but an absence of the necessary appliances, the sailor furnishes the needed intermediary between the distributer and the Societies here. There are many little points of light scattered here and there in the world's dark places, kept burning with oil which the sailor brings.

I remember one case of an old American captain, married and long resident in Buenos Ayres, and at one time commanding its fleet, with whom I corresponded, who did noble service for years in distributing at the small settlements upon the coast to the south, as far as Patagonia, a region not visited by our own shipping. This same man discovered and brought away the re-

mains of the ill-fated missionaries under Captain Gardner who starved to death on the coast of Patagonia. In another case, an acquaintance made by a captain with an English merchant living at Fray Bentos and Gualeguaychu on the Uruguay river, resulted in large Spanish distributions in that region, from which at one time $200 was received and paid over to the Societies here.

Again, *the cabin* of the packet, which carries regularly foreign passengers to and from Roman-catholic ports, furnishes a grand field for the Bible and the tract. By the help of seamen, this important position can be, and to a considerable extent is, so occupied, that the gospel shall be brought to bear upon the mass of that travelling element, which—providentially in the custody of seamen for days and weeks together upon the ocean—is so largely made up of the mercantile and educated classes, men of force of character and of influence in their several countries. This thought is well brought out in the report of one of our captains, as follows:

"I consider these distributions, which have been going on for so many years in the ports of Brazil, really an important element of influence in the civilization and elevation of the country. We often carry as passengers men of intelligence and position; and the reading of a Testament or a tract on the voyage by such men may have far-reaching consequences."

Were there space, anecdotes might be multiplied of

deep religious impressions, in some cases of apparent conversions, resulting from such reading at sea.

I must not omit to mention another service which seamen are rendering to evangelistic work abroad. The American Tract Society publishes, say a new Spanish or Portuguese book for the young, just suited to the needs of schools in South America, superior to the native article in matter, paper, illustrations, and price, and therefore sure to make its way when once introduced. But how to make it known through those vast and sparsely-settled regions? Now comes in the office of the Christian seaman; by whose aid, invoked here in New York, specimen copies, labelled with statement of price, etc., can in six months be placed in the hands of leading men and merchants in perhaps fifty seaports on the islands and mainland: and, as the result, within another six months, orders for the book, coming through the ordinary channels of trade, will be dropping in at the Tract House; and presently children nominally Catholic, thousands of miles away from New York will be studying the book, and gathering with other knowledge the rudiments of Bible Christianity.

It is partly by such aid that the admirable little volume of the Tract Society, the "*Cartilla para los Niños*," 108 pages, has attained its large circulation of 46,000 copies in Spanish, and 26,000 in Portuguese.

An anecdote about this book may not be out of place. Says a captain from Yucatan,

"I want you for the coming voyage, to give me all the books you can. I took up the last to Merida the capital, eighty miles in the interior, and had no opposition from the bishop, as on the previous occasion. The priest at —— is my warm friend, and does not hesitate to speak in favor of the books publicly. His approval has done much for their circulation here. At Merida, when we were at the dinner-table—some twenty or so, at the hotel—a play-actor took occasion to praise the Spanish spelling-book, of which you sent specimens, and to read aloud some of the Scripture passages in it. He pronounced them sublime. I have a special request from this man for a Bible, as also from a judge of the High Court, a man of eminence."

Besides advertising in this world-wide fashion evangelical books, captains frequently arrange direct sales, bringing orders for particular books, one copy or a dozen or more. I recollect one case where in two voyages a captain sold at Maranhão some two hundred copies of the Tract Primer just mentioned.

The theory of this work through seamen embraces also the supply of the Bible *for sale.* Yet here we find a practical difficulty. In the matter of selling, the sailor is hardly the model colporteur. He cannot resist the plea of the needy but impecunious applicant. He is a little ashamed to take money for the "free" gospel, and will scarcely do for us what he would not do for himself were the book his own. Often he will compound

matters, by giving freely the Bible, and returning to the Society the price out of his own pocket, which does not exactly meet the point of the rule. As a consequence, the supplies furnished to shipping for this foreign use, are restricted mainly to the Testament and the tract. It is out of the question to supply Bibles in quantity for gratuitous use. The market must at any rate be left unspoiled for the regular Bible agent, when in due time he shall arrive. For we are firmly persuaded that self-supply by purchase is the healthy normal method: the only one, by which large populations can be adequately put in possession of so expensive a book as the whole Bible.

Yet cases have been by no means wanting, of captains who, recognizing the rationale of the restriction, have been willing to keep regularly the Bible on sale. I recollect one, who, in three trading voyages to the Pacific ports of Central America, sold more than one hundred dollars' worth of Spanish Scriptures and books; and at this present time, the brig Alice, trading to Honduras (and I might name others), rarely returns to port without bringing money for Spanish Bibles sold.

And here is a specimen of work which a captain was habitually doing for years, in a small port in Brazil.

"He states that there is a growing demand for Bibles and tracts at ——, originating mainly in these distributions by him and

other captains of vessels. He now pays $2 25 for three Portuguese Bibles, and brings me ten letters, containing orders for forty copies more. Some of these letters are quite formally addressed to '*Illustrissimos Senhores Directores da Biblia*,' etc., with the opening salutation of '*Saude e Branda Paz em o Senhor!*' (health and sweet peace in the Lord). The captain also brings orders for a considerable number of the American Tract Society's books from the principal of the '*Collegio de San Miguel.*'"

No difficulty has been experienced in securing the the coöperation of seamen in this benevolent work. If the captain or mate is not professedly religious, a kindly willingness to do a service, which is characteristic of the sailor, will generally lead him to take charge of our package; the more readily the second time, when he finds that it gives him little trouble, and brings him a pleasant return of thanks from those receiving its contents. If he is a Christian man—and the number is large and increasing—this work appeals powerfully to his sense of duty; or better, is welcomed as an opportunity of loving service for the Master. In both cases we have a pledge that the charge when assumed will be faithfully performed, in the business training of ship's officers as the habitual custodians of the property of others, accustomed to receive and to discharge commissions in regard to it.

As a matter of fact, hundreds of these men give us steadily their devoted service, and expect their supplies each voyage as regularly as they do their cargo.

Further, a large work is made possible by the fact that the carriers of the world's commerce are mainly Protestants. Catholic countries, France, Austria, and especially Italy, have considerable shipping engaged in foreign commerce: still the fact remains that the flags generally met with upon the high seas are those of Protestant nations, English, American, German, Scandinavian.* From all these comes our working force.

Yet this foreign missionary work we are considering is distinctively American. And occasionally we have curious illustrations of the way in which, through it, the American flag has come to be associated on distant shores with the Bible and the tract. One of these was furnished in a letter received from a pious lieutenant in the Dutch naval service, upon "H. N. M. Brig Venus," Curaçao Station, as follows:

"I am also grateful for the tidings I have received of your Society in different parts of the globe. Having been a very long time at Batavia, in the East Indies, I knew by experiment that American ships generally were in possession of Bibles and tracts. By means of your ships the Word of God and our Blessed Saviour has been distributed all over the globe. A couple of years ago, I was walking with a Christian friend of mine along the quay of

* Of 6,244 vessels arriving last year at this port from foreign countries, 5,409 were of Protestant nations. All others, 835. The details of the former are, American 2,205, British 2,110, Norwegian 605, German 370, Swedish 49, Dutch 47, Danish 21.

Rotterdam, when I invited him to step at once on board the first ship with stars and stripes we should see. He would not believe it, when lo, on the very first one, we were asked what we wanted, Bibles or tracts."

One thought more: this work benefits the worker. The non-religious sailor when he is giving the gospel to others, must needs think of his own personal lack. With the Christian worker, it is a reviving influence, a lesson upon the relation of seamen to the coming conversion of the world, a training-school for a higher style of missionary labor; for which again this work gives ample opportunity.

Finally, I desire to say that the results of these distributions, so widely scattered and so perseveringly continued for a quarter of a century, are not to be measured by the mere statistics of volumes put in circulation, nor by tidings of visible success, however abundant and interesting. This is but a pioneer work, preparing the way, we trust, for other and larger work to come. Perhaps its greatest value consists in the advertisement of the gospel at points inaccessible to other agencies; in interest excited, self-supply stimulated, correspondence begun, new avenues opened, and fresh demands for the printed truth discovered or created; in the wide sowing of germinant ideas; in prejudices removed; in the respect of communities slowly won for American

(Protestant) books and liberality; and in the gradual crumbling of the barrier against a free Bible—all these being its possible results.

One of the leaders in the recent religious reformation in Spain traces his conversion to a tract read in the cabin of an American vessel. From Mexico, we hear much of the sudden and wonderful conquests made by the truth within the past eight years; yet who shall say that these would have been possible, without the preparatory distributions which had been going on in that country, by every available vessel from this port, for the twenty years previous?